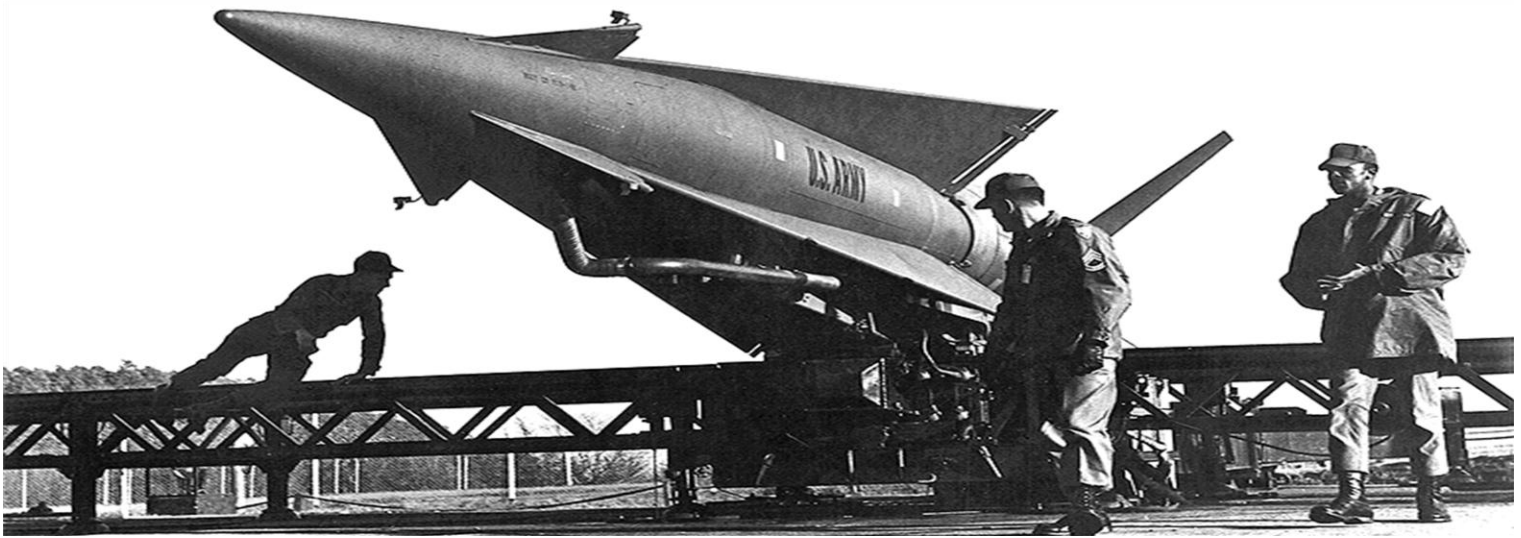




Nike Missile Site HM-69



"It is insane that two men, sitting on opposite sides of the world, should be able to decide to bring an end to civilization."

- John F. Kennedy, 27 October 1962

A Relic of the Cold War



Alpha Battery, Launcher Area at
Everglades National Park

Everglades National Park houses one of the best preserved relics of the Cold War in Florida. A historic Nike Hercules Missile Base, dubbed HM-69, remains virtually the same as it was when official use of the site was terminated in 1979.

This missile base was built by the United States Army Corps of Engineers, completed in 1964 at the height of the Cold War, immediately following the Cuban Missile Crisis of October, 1962. At a time when national security against Soviet attack was America's main priority, the United States Army chose this strategic site within Everglades National Park, located 160 miles from the Cuban coast, to build an anti-aircraft missile site.

The area includes 22 buildings and structures associated with events that have made a significant contribution to American history. Some of the extant structures include three missile barns, a missile assembly building, a guard dog kennel and barracks.

The Cuban Missile Crisis



The proximity of Cuba made this a "crisis".

On October 14th, 1962, an American U2 spy plane flying reconnaissance photographed Soviet Missile Sites in Cuba. The next day President Kennedy was informed of the presence of missiles capable of delivering nuclear warheads to major U.S. cities and killing millions of Americans in minutes.

Throughout the Cold War, the United States' Air Defenses had been poised only to defend against attacks coming from the Soviet Union over the North Pole. There were no known threats in South America. The Cuban Missile Crisis revealed that fallacy, exposing south Florida as the nation's "Achilles' heel."

The Nation's Response



U.S. Army, Temporary Nike Missile Site in Farm Fields 1962

As the Cuban Missile Crisis played out, the military scrambled to seal the U.S. perimeter in South Florida.

In late October 1962 the U.S. Army's 2nd Missile Battalion, 52nd Air Defense Artillery was deployed in the middle of the night not knowing their final destination. The 2nd Missile Battalion was made up of four Batteries, each consisting of a Battery Commander and approximately 150 men.

Two Batteries set up tent encampments just outside the entrance to Everglades National Park. Heat and humidity made it a struggle to maintain sensitive equipment while frequent rains turned fields into mud.

In response to the gravity of the situation, park managers at Everglades National Park issued the U.S. Army a permit to build a base within the park. In 1965, A Battery moved to the new permanent missile site, HM-69.

Living in Fear



Duck and Cover Drills

With the nation on edge, south Florida residents took comfort in the sight of missiles being trucked down main streets to the four Nike Hercules Missile Batteries and eight Hawk Missile Batteries located from North Miami south to Key West.

Within the park, A Battery soldiers maintained 41-foot missiles in a constant state of readiness.

Some missiles were fitted with nuclear warheads capable of intercepting an entire fleet of bombers. The nuclear warheads ranged up to 40 kilotons, roughly three times the power of the Hiroshima bomb.

Although these missiles sites served to protect the Miami metropolitan area, a Nike Hercules was capable of striking a ground target within mainland Cuba.

Semper Paratus (Always Ready)



President Kennedy and General Sweeney award the Meritorious Unit Commendation

The air defenders in South Florida regularly saw Soviet and Cuban piloted MiGs on their radar screens.

On November 26, 1962 President Kennedy travelled to Homestead Air Force Site to personally award the men of the 52nd Air Defense Artillery the Army's Meritorious Unit Commendation.

Generally this commendation was given during wartime but Kennedy felt they played a key role in deterring further escalation of the crisis.

A Battery also received "Excellence" awards four years in a row for precision and accuracy during annual inspection. An "E" for excellence streamer was permanently added to the Battery flag.

We owe life as we know it, in part, to the skill, accuracy and restraint of these Cold Warriors. On the ground in south Florida, "eyeball to eyeball" with the enemy, these men appropriately responded to the constant testing of our defenses by enemy aircraft and never once jumped the gun. They are heroes of a war never fought.

Preservation



Volunteers educate visitors and maintain the site for future generations.

In 2004, by the effort of a Nike Veteran, Nike Missile Site HM-69 was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Park staff and volunteers work hard to maintain the site and provide public education to ensure the site's continued preservation. The Park also researches and gathers histories from 2nd Missile Battalion, 52nd Air Defense Artillery veterans.

If you have information related to A Battery or would like to serve as a Nike Missile Site volunteer, please contact the Nike Missile Site coordinator at 305-242-7700.

Access to the site is only available through ranger guided tours. For specific tour times and information, stop by the Ernest Coe Visitor Center, visit the park's website at www.nps.gov/ever, or call 305-242-7700.

